

SAMPLE

EAST 350: Gender and Sexuality in Chinese Literature

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Office Hours: Th 1:30-3:30 pm or by appointment

Sherbrooke 680, Room 282 (second floor)

WARNING: Course readings contain sexually explicit materials, which will be examined critically within an academic context.

Complete syllabus is available to students enrolled in the class.

Course Description:

This course examines the intersection of women, gender, sexuality, and writing in premodern China, spanning from the first century to the late nineteenth century. Key topics include philosophical conceptions of gender and sexuality, women and women writers, gendered writing, the human body in medical and religious traditions, erotica and pornography, homosexuality, and transgender history and literature. The readings encompass a wide range of literary genres, including poetry, prose, drama, and fiction, and are complemented by videos and visual materials. Together, these materials will lead us to explore how gender and sexuality shaped individual identities, family structures, societal norms, and broader political systems, including the imperial state and the modern nation that we would call China.

This course has two primary goals: it will allow you to gain a deep understanding of the history of women, gender, and sexuality in premodern China; it will help you closely and critically analyze literary writings under specific historical contexts.

All readings will be in English, with original Chinese texts provided when relevant. Students who choose to read the Chinese texts are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the English translations so as to actively and effectively participate in class discussions.

This course has no prerequisites. For students without prior knowledge of China, it is recommended to consult Tanner's *China: A History* (see below) for an overview of the history of premodern China.

Requirements and Grading:

In-Class Participation (15%): This grade includes attendance and active contributions to in-class discussions.

Online Discussion (15%): Most reading and discussion will take place on *Perusall*. Treat *Perusall* as a collaborative tool rather than just an assignment—it is a space for you to engage with the class. To receive full participation credit, you must contribute quality annotations for at least 10 weeks. You may post on either Tuesday, Thursday, or both in a given week. There is no limit to the number of posts you can submit. You may raise questions, respond to others' posts, or comment on the readings. Your grade will be based on both the quantity and quality of your contributions.

Group Presentation (15%): Early in the semester, you will sign up for one presentation. Your presentation should include two parts:

a) An overview of the stories, historical background, authors' biographies, significant themes, and key details from the readings.

b) A summary of the online discussions on *Perusall*.

Presentations are limited to three people per session, and you must submit your plan for feedback at least one day before the class meeting.

In-Class Quizzes (25%): There will be six unannounced quizzes throughout the semester, each consisting of 3-5 quick questions on the day's readings. Each quiz will take approximately 3-5 minutes. The five highest scores will count toward your final grade.

Final Project (30%): The final project may take the form of a research paper (12-15 pages), a literature review (12-15 pages), or a work of creative expression. Further details and guidelines will be provided in class.

Important Texts and Tools:

Bibliography of Asian Studies

Google Scholar

Patricia Ebrey. *Women and the Family in Chinese History*. Routledge, 2003. See the "Suggested Readings" at the end of the textbook.

A concise introduction to Chinese history: [Harold Miles Tanner](#). *China: A History*, Vol. 1: *From Neolithic cultures through the Great Qing Empire 10,000 BCE-1799 CE*. Hackett Publishing, 2010.

For a collection of women's writings in premodern China, see Wilt L. Idema, and Beata Grant, eds. *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004.

Schedule and Readings (readings with * are optional; they can be references for your papers)

Conditions for Gendered Writing

Week 1

Introduction:

Yinyang and Gender

Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee. *Confucianism and Women*. Chapter 3.

* Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, chap. 6

Week 2

Script for Women: A Case in Contemporary China

"In a Script of Their Own", In *Red Brush*, 543-566 (focus on 543-46, 555-66)

* "Introduction" in *Red Brush*, pp. 1-9.

* Wilt L. Idema, "Introduction," in *Heroines of Jiangyong: Chinese Ballads in Women's Script*.

Screening: Yue-Qing Yang, *Nu-shu: a hidden language of women in China* (1999)

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/watch/video/14880776>

Women and the State

Week 3

Two Thousand Years Earlier: The Scholar Ban Zhao

"Ban Zhao", "Thoughts upon Reading the 'Biography of Ban Zhao,'" in *Red Brush*, 17-42, 657-658.

* Xia Xiaohong, "New Meanings in a Classic: Differing Interpretations of Ban Zhao and her *Admonitions for Women* in the Late Qing Dynasty," 3-16.

* "Books for Women and Women Readers," in Joseph McDermott and Peter Burke, *The Book Worlds of East Asia and Europe, 1450-1850*

Empress Wu Zetian and Her Ghost Writer

Shangguan Wan'er, in *Red Brush*, 61-72

* Ebrey, "Rethinking the Imperial Harem", Ch. 8 of *Women and the Family in Chinese History*

* Jay, Jennifer W. "Imagining Matriarchy: Kingdoms of Women" in Tang China." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1996): 220-229.

Marriage and Family

Week 4

Women as Wives

Women, Gender, and Sexuality in China, Chapter 2

Beyond Exemplar Tales: Women's Biography in Chinese History, chap. 1
Mann, "Life Course of Women"

Canonizing Female Virtues

Classic of Filial Piety for Women

* *Beyond Exemplar Tales*, chaps. 3-6

Week 5

Widowhood

Women as Family Teachers

Beyond the Family

Week 6

A Courtesan Writer

Writings by Buddhist Nuns

Sex and the Body

Week 8

The Sexual Body in Daoism and Medicine

Foot-binding in History and Literature

Erotica and Pornography

Homosexuality, Transgender, and Cross-dressing

What role does the law play?

In Search of the Modern?

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